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Augustine Accused: Megalius, Manichaeism, and the Inception of the Confessions

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Although no one motive or purpose accounts for the complex character of the *Confessions*, one relatively neglected factor in the context of its composition is the controversy within the African Catholic Church over Augustine's Manichaean past, and the circumstances in which the Primate of Numidia, Megalius, objected to Augustine's advancement to the episcopacy on these grounds and subjected him to an episcopal inquiry. By reconstructing the likely details of Megalius's charges against Augustine and comparing them with the facts of Augustine's history as they would have been viewed by those unsympathetic to him, we can better appreciate the dire circumstances in which Augustine composed several reflections in the mid-390s C.E. on the ethics of lying by either commission or omission, and how at least part of the *Confessions*' narrative is likely to have taken shape in the context of Augustine's strategic response to charges he could not answer on the record of his own known conduct. By making the issue one of the interior progress of his soul, invisible to those who only could see the lagging conduct of his behavior, Augustine won over the guardians of the African Catholica, and went on to build upon the foundation of his defense the *Confessions* as we now know it.

A relentless tide of focused studies on aspects of Augustine's *Confessions* over the last century has made it increasingly apparent that there is much more going on in Augustine's most famous work than straightforward

This article began life as a paper at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the North American Patristics Society; I am grateful for the observations and questions offered by those in attendance. I wish to express my thanks to the anonymous readers of JECS for helping me to express myself more carefully and shed some of the rhetorical excesses better suited to the oral milieu, and to Ellen Muehlberger for her close attention to detail in finalizing the manuscript.

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autobiography.[1] More general biographies of the Catholic saint have lagged noticeably behind this development of a critical understanding of the text, and even in countless otherwise very erudite articles published in recent decades, assertions or denials about Augustine's actions, thoughts, feelings, and motivations in the earlier period of his life are still justified by no more than that he says so in the *Confessions*. But what choice do biographers of Augustine have? We depend almost entirely on his testimony for nearly everything we think we know about this pivotal figure in Christian history. All the more reason, then, that we should sit up and take special notice on those few occasions when we encounter someone else from his world saying something about Augustine.

This study aims to encourage the reader to take special notice of such an occasion, practically lost to us, but fragmentarily preserved in allusive references in Augustine's own writings, and in one crucial text over which he did not have control. The incident dates back to the key moment when Augustine was being considered for the episcopacy of Hippo, with the bulk of his contributions to the Catholic faith still before him. It passed quickly, but was long remembered and publicly recalled by those who found reason to question Augustine's character and intentions in using his powerful rhetorical skills to advance the Catholic cause in North Africa. Their challenge of Augustine was strengthened by their ability to cite against him the words of his own church superior, Megalius, Primate of Numidia. Close correlations between the timing and nature of Megalius's voiced concerns about Augustine and the inception and focus of his *Confessions* suggests a possible causative relationship that has hitherto gone unnoticed, and my purpose here is to see how far the evidence for such a relationship can be pushed within the limits of our knowledge of the circumstances of both events.

Previous research has picked apart such episodes of the *Confessions* as the famous conversion scene in the garden in Milan,[2] or the joint ascent

1. For a comprehensive overview of the literature, see Erich Feldmann, "Confessiones," *Augustinus-Lexikon*, vol. 1; C. Mayer et al., eds. (Basel: Schwabe, 1994), 1134–93. For a mid-century summary and assessment, see Aimé Solignac's introduction in *Les Confessions, Livres I–VII*, Bibliothèque Augustinienne, Oeuvres de Saint Augustin 13 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962).

2. Among the vast literature devoted to this subject, special note should be made of Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1968), and the extensive body of research produced by Leo Ferrari, of which a useful summation can be found in his "Saint Augustine's Conversion Scene: The End of a Modern Debate?" *SP* 22 (1989): 235–50.

of Augustine and Monnica in Ostia,[3] for their historical veracity. An even larger effort has gone into scrutinizing Augustine's conversion overall for its actual character and orientation in comparison to his representation of it.[4] These areas of investigation, shaped in part by concerns over Augustine's usability as a religious authority and role model, have left earlier portions of the narrative largely in the shadows. Certainly, Augustine's biographers have made good use of the first four books of the *Confessions* for constructing the foil of the pre-converted Augustine, the figure designed by Augustine himself to be systematically negated and left behind, both in the narrative and in history. But it is the seemingly transitional part of the story, beginning with book five and Augustine's decision to leave Africa in 383 C.E., to which our attention is drawn by the circumstances around Augustine at the time he initiated the *Confessions* project. Previous discussion of Augustine's motives and purpose in writing the *Confessions* has tended to presume an Augustine largely self-motivated by various reflections and intentions; and several of these suggestions remain compelling for the work in its final, completed form. Here I would like to draw out the possible external forces operating on Augustine that may have motivated him to begin the work on a much more limited scale, and with a much more immediate purpose of defending himself against accusations and suspicions regarding the circumstances and impetus of his departure from Africa several years earlier, and the integrity of his decision overseas to convert to Catholicism.

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At the conference summoned at Carthage by imperial command to settle once and for all the schism between the Donatist and Catholic churches of Africa, in 411 C.E., there occurred a rather strange incident in a career of

3. A useful summary is Frederick Van Fleteren, "Mysticism in the *Confessiones*: A Controversy Revisited," in F. Van Fleteren et al., eds., *Collectanea Augustiniana: Augustine, Mystic and Mystagogue* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 309–36.

4. The issue was introduced simultaneously by Gaston Boissier, "La conversion de saint Augustin," *Revue des deux mondes* 85 (1888): 43–69, and by Adolf von Harnack in a lecture of the same year, later published in *Monasticism and The Confessions of Saint Augustine* (New York: Putnam, 1910). The classic challenge to the historicity of the account given by Augustine in the *Confessions*, to which all subsequent studies of the subject in some way respond, is that of Prosper Alfaric, *L'Evolution intellectuelle de saint Augustin, I: Du Manichéisme au Néoplatonisme* (Paris: E. Nourry, 1918). For a concise bibliographic summary of the debate to date, see Feldmann, "Confessiones," 1135–36.

rather strange incidents for Augustine of Hippo. The Donatist spokesman, Petilian, suddenly asked Augustine who had ordained him. The Catholic summary of the conference, penned by Augustine himself, claims that he answered without hesitation, and the discussion moved on to other matters.[5] The official acts of the conference, recorded by government scribes, tell a rather different story[6]: Petilian's question caused something of a tumult. Augustine's friends Alypius and Possidius stepped in and objected to the question. The imperial legate Marcellinus found it necessary to insist three times that Augustine answer.[7] What Augustine then said causes the reader to sit up and take notice:

> I am a faithful Christian, with God as my witness, a Catholic. . . . I am a defender of this Church. . . . Human calumnies cannot alienate me from it. . . . Megalius, primate of the Catholic Church of Numidia, ordained me. . . . Look, I have responded. Continue, produce what you have

5. *Coll.* 3.7.9 (G. Finaert and E. Lamirande, eds., *Traités Anti-Donatistes*, vol. 5, Bibliothèque Augustinienne, Oeuvres de Saint Augustin 32 [Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965], 151): *Quaesierunt etiam quis ordinauerit Augustinum, nescio quas, sicut iactabatur, calumnias praeparantes. ubi cum eis intrepide responderet a Megalio se ordinatum, qui tunc fuerit primas episcoporum in Numidia ecclesiae catholicae, et urgeret instanter, ut iam proferrent quae praeparauerunt, ut ibi etiam calumniosi demonstrarentur, illi intentionem in aliud detorserunt, redeuntes ad Caeciliani personam.*

6. *Gesta coll.* 3.234–247 (S. Lancel, *Gesta Conlationis Carthaginiensis Anno 411*, CCSL 149 A [Turnhout: Brepols, 1974], 237–41).

7. Petilian asks Augustine who ordained him to the episcopacy (3.238); another Donatist speaks up, quoting scripture (239). Alypius interrupts, calling the remark out of order (240). At this point, the imperial commissioner Marcellinus instructs Augustine to answer the question (241). Instead, Augustine gives a lengthy statement calling into question the relevance of the issue (242). Petilian presses him: "How does this tell us who ordained you? Tell us who ordained you" (243). Marcellinus for a second time instructs Augustine to answer: "The question is in order. Give into evidence the name of the person who ordained you" (243). But the Catholics Possidius, Fortunatianus, and Alypius simultaneously interrupt, feigning confusion over who is being addressed and challenging the relevance of the question (244). Finally, the Donatist Adeodatus breaks through the tumult, shouting "Augustine!", to which the Catholic Possidius answers, "Augustine is not on trial here." Adeodatus, however, responds, "This is a desperate ploy, a flagrant attempt not to answer. You are not empowered not to answer. Augustine, tell us who ordained you!" (245). Augustine begins to answer, "I consider this superfluous . . . ," but Marcellinus interrupts him, and for the third time insists, "Please answer the question" (246). After repeating his view that the question is beside the point of the debate, Augustine proceeds to his noteworthy answer. The discrepancies between the official acts and Augustine's account have been noted, and the issues involved considered, by E. Lamirande in his notes to the *Coll.* in Finaert and Lamirande, *Traités Anti-Donatistes*, 5:710–13.

> prepared. . . . I have said the name of he who ordained me. Go on, make your slanders.[8]

Petilian refrained on this occasion from saying anything more on the subject. He apparently had scored his point merely by having Megalius's name raised. What was going on here?

Augustine was confronting once again the rumors and innuendos that followed him like a shadow throughout his career and had been given embarrassing sanction by a letter once written by Megalius, Catholic Primate of Numidia, almost twenty years earlier. The letter had been cited by Petilian against Augustine already a decade before the conference of Carthage, and again a few years later by the Donatist Cresconius. When, on that day at Carthage, Augustine said, "Go on, make your slanders," he showed that he was expecting to be faced once again with these by now familiar allegations.

Augustine's earlier responses to Petilian and Cresconius provide the only information we have on Megalius's letter.[9] From these references, we gather the following. After Augustine had been made a priest at Hippo, but before he was made coadjutor bishop of the city (*quod de me adhuc presbytero*[10]), Megalius had written a letter (*epistulam . . . scripsit*[11]) against Augustine (*aduersus me*[12]) refusing to approve his ordination (*te ordinari nollet*[13])

8. *Ego cuius ordinatorem requiris homo sum christianus, fidelis, quod Deo teste loquor, catholicus, unde adhuc ambigimus quis dignus hoc nomine uocitetur. Ego illam ecclesiam defendo, hanc adsero qualicumque uoce, in qua quidquid fuero illa ecclesia est. Video quo tendas; humanas calumnias consectaris et quae soleatis iactare et dicere non alienum est ab auribus uel a cordibus nostris. Megalius me ordinauit, primas ecclesiae Numidiae catholicae, eo tempore quo ille me potuit ordinare. Ecce respondi. Prosequere, profer quae praeparas, ibi etiam calumniosus appareas. Ecce dixi ordinatorem meum; profer iam calumnias tuas.*

9. The three passages are *C. litt. Petil.* 3.16.19; *C. Cresc.* 3.80.92; *C. Cresc.* 4.64.79.

10. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.16.19.

11. *Cresc.* 3.80.92; 4.64.79; *C. litt. Petil.* 3.16.19.

12. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.16.19.

13. *Cresc.* 3.80.92. That is, rejecting Valerius of Hippo's proposal to ordain Augustine as his coadjutor in the episcopacy, rather than objecting after the fact to Augustine's ordination as a priest (*pace* B. Quinot in Finaert and Quinot, *Traités Anti-Donatistes*, vol. 3, 569–70). Note *ordinari* ***nollet***, and the timing of Megalius's action *quod de me* ***adhuc*** *presbytero*. Augustine's biographer Possidius reports that Valerius had obtained tacit support for his plans for Augustine from Aurelius, bishop of Carthage and Primate of Africa, and presented the idea to Megalius during a visit of the latter, along with other local bishops, to Hippo (*Vita* 8.2–3). This may have occurred as the bishops returned together from the Catholic conference held at

with a degree of anger (*iratus*[14]) and making certain accusations (*accusationem*[15]). These accusations were investigated by a synodal commission comprised of bishops (*in episcoporum concilio probare*;[16] *a sancto concilio*[17]), and in the end Megalius retracted his accusations in writing, formally condemning the allegations and asking pardon for ever having made them (*eius a quo scripta dicitur non perspicua pro nobis sententia legeretur illam calumniam falsitatemque condemnans*;[18] *eius ipsius—sententia se corrigentis et de hac re ueniam postulantis legam esse damnatum*[19]). He subsequently approved and presided over Augustine's ordination as coadjutor bishop of Hippo (*ordinator futurus episcopatus mei*[20]). The Donatists actually possessed a copy of the letter, so they were fully informed of its content and the exact nature of Megalius's initial accusations.[21]

What was the nature of the accusations made by Megalius, and in what circumstances had they been made, investigated, and withdrawn? We lack both the letter and the Donatist report of it. What we do know, however, is that Petilian cited it in the context of a concerted argument accusing Augustine of being a crypto-Manichaean, and the peculiar way in which Augustine answered Petilian at the Council of Carthage, beginning with a profession of his Catholic faith, suggests that indeed the letter raised some issue about Augustine's Manichaean past, and perhaps cast doubt on the authenticity of his conversion.[22] Petilian made five specific charges in his attacks on Augustine in the immediate context of his allusion to Megalius's letter, any or all of which might derive from that source.

First, Petilian reported, factually it would seem, that Augustine had

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Carthage in 394 C.E., or on some other occasion the following year. Since Megalius wrote his objections rather than making them on the spot, we might suppose that he only discovered the issues surrounding Augustine after he had left Hippo, and his anger might have been in part due to what he regarded as Valerius's carelessness or even duplicity in not fully informing him. Possidius omits all reference to Megalius's initial opposition to Augustine's promotion.

14. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.16.19; *Cresc.* 4.64.79.
15. *Cresc.* 4.64.79.
16. *Cresc.* 4.64.79.
17. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.16.19.
18. *Cresc.* 3.80.92.
19. *Cresc.* 4.64.79.
20. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.16.19.
21. *Cresc.* 3.80.92.
22. As observed by E. Lamirande, in Finaert and Lamirande, *Traités Anti-Donatistes*, vol. 5, 711.

been named as a notorious Manichaean in the acts (*gesta*) of the anti-Manichaean proceedings before the African proconsul Messianus in 385 or 386 C.E.,[23] who had sentenced him in absentia, most likely to exile and loss of civil rights.[24] This fact, of course, would have been of very great concern to the Catholic leadership when contemplating Augustine's rapid rise to prominence in their ranks. Petilian incorrectly assumed that Augustine had fled Africa in the aftermath of Messianus's judgment, when in fact Augustine had left Africa some two years earlier, immediately following the publication of the anti-Manichaean edict which Messianus was belatedly enforcing. In response to Petilian's airing of the charge in this form, Augustine brought forward a detail of his career missing from the account of it he gave in the *Confessions*, namely, that he had delivered a panegyric to Bauto on the occasion of his assuming the consulship on January 1, 385 C.E.—a fact which proved that he was already out of Africa by the time Messianus initiated proceedings against the African Manichaeans.[25] If Megalius in the years before the composition of the *Confessions* had made the same false assumption as Petilian later did, we would expect the detail of the panegyric to Bauto to have been already integrated into Augustine's presentation of his story.

It seems more likely, therefore, that anything Megalius said on the subject of Augustine's flight from Africa was related rather to its timing so immediately after the publication of the anti-Manichaean law in 383 C.E.. He indeed may have included the fact that Augustine was named in the judgment of the proconsul, about which he was in a position to know since the proceeding had in fact been initiated by Catholics. Yet he was probably well enough informed to know that Augustine was already out of Africa by that time and had been sentenced in absentia. Petilian's mistake about the relative sequence of Augustine's flight and the proceedings before Messianus could be explained by his reliance on Megalius for his information about the legal judgment against Augustine, and not having

23. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.16.19; Augustine's paraphrase: *ignotorum mihi et notorum gesta recitet damnatorum et, quod ibi amicus quondam meus magis ad defensionem suam me nominauit absentem, in calumniam praeiudicanti criminis nescio quo nouo et suo iure conuertat.*

24. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.25.30; Augustine's paraphrase: *inter multa etiam prorsus ad rem non pertinentia, dicit Messiani proconsularis sententia me fuisse percussum, ut ex Africa fugerem.* B. Quinot, in Finaert and Qionot, *Traités Anti-Donatistes*, vol. 3, 568–69, notes the evident significance of *sententia* in this passage.

25. A fact apparently established by the date given in the acts of the proceedings (*C. litt. Petil.* 3.25.30).

direct access to the official documentation. He would be vulnerable to any ambiguity or missing details in Megalius's remarks.

Second, Petilian claimed that Augustine had sent with his letters—at some unspecified point in his life—certain suspicious items, including a piece of consecrated bread and a love spell.[26] Keeping in mind that Augustine's correspondence was not yet published at the time these allegations arose, any such accusations growing out of the contents of his letters would necessarily entail some offense being taken at them by either the recipients or the bearers. Since neither of these were likely to be Donatists, this sort of issue also may have been taken up by Megalius in order for Donatists ever to learn of it. Modern scholarship has inclined towards identifying the two offending contents of Augustine's correspondence mentioned by Petilian with a single letter, *Ep*. 31 to Paulinus and Therasia.[27] If this is the letter intended by Petilian, it was written too late to have been one of the concerns raised by Megalius. Yet we should not be overconfident that we have identified, or even have, the letter(s) referred to by Petilian. Most of Augustine's early correspondence is not preserved. Apologetic interests in part motivate the eagerness to identify Petilian's accusations with the innocuous phrases of *Ep*. 31, into which only a perverse mind could read the sort of suspicions Petilian aired. On the other hand, Augustine's eclectic interests encompassed such things as numerology[28] and astrology[29] that

26. *C. litt. Petil*. 3.16.19; Augustine's paraphrase and response: *titulos epistularum mearum a se uel a suis sicut eis placuit inscriptos legat et tamquam me in eis comprehendisse se gestiat confitentem. eulogias panis simpliciter et hilariter datas ridiculo nomine uenenosae turpitudinis ac furoris infamet et de uestro corde tam male sentiat, ut amatoria maleficia data mulieri marito non solum conscio, uerum etiam fauente credi sibi posse praesumat*.

27. See, e.g., P. Courcelle, *Recherches*, 239 n. 2. Shortly following this letter, Paulinus and Therasia do seem to have broken off correspondence with Augustine for a time, despite his repeated inquiries into why they were not answering his letters (this seems to be the case, given Augustine's repeated inquiries into why they were not responding to his letters, rather than that a portion of the correspondence is lost, *pace* Courcelle, *Recherches*, 31). Yet this break in communication did not occur immediately after the supposedly offending letter. The couple wrote to Romanianus after receiving it, still highly praising Augustine; and they wrote to Augustine himself, congratulating him on his ordination (*Ep*. 32).

28. See, e.g., his *Liber XXI sent*. 5; *Quaest*. 57 & 81

29. On Augustine's strong interest in astrology, see *Conf*. 4.3.4–6, 5.7.12. He was still performing astrological consultations in Milan in 386 C.E. (*Conf*. 7.6.8–10); see L. Ferrari, "Peculiar Appendage of Augustine's Ennaration in Psalmum LXI," *Augustiniana* 28 (1978): 18–33. In *Ord*. 2.15.42, he still considers *astrologia* the highest stage in the mind's ascent to things divine; cf. *Acad*. 1.6.17; *Quant. an*. 33.72; *Ord*. 2.16.44.

might have been looked at askance by his more conservative elders in the Church. We cannot rule out the possibility that his early letters contained elements that in their eyes were not completely appropriate for a man in his new station as a Catholic priest. The sort of things mentioned by Petilian were common enough in the exchange of letters in Augustine's time, and so much could be made of them in Augustine's case only because they could be associated with his Manichaean past.[30]

Third, Petilian charged that Augustine had been baptized as a Manichaean.[31] Primary Manichaean sources appear to prove that the Manichaeans did not actually practice baptism, as Augustine asserts in response to Petilian, although the latter claimed to have the testimony of a former Manichaean that they did. The strength of Petilian's charge rested rather on the inconvenient fact that Augustine had not been baptized as a Catholic in Africa, but overseas, opening the way for doubts and innuendos. Yet if Megalius had specified baptism as his concern in his letter, we would expect to see Augustine's Catholic baptism featured more prominently in the *Confessions*, where instead it is given a single short sentence. Any baptism as a Manichaean would be irrelevant once Augustine had been (re-)baptized as a Catholic. So highlighting his baptism at the hands of Ambrose would be a sufficient response. Surprisingly, then, we find that Augustine does not even bother to be specific about the identity of his baptizer in the *Confessions*, so it can hardly have been a concern in the years before he wrote that work. Baptism, of course, lay at the center of the Catholic-Donatist arguments that came to the fore in the years following the composition of

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See the invaluable studies of Thomas O'Laughlin, "The *Libri Philosophorum* and Augustine's Conversions," in Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey, eds., *The Relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1992), 101–25; "The Development of Augustine the Bishop's Critique of Astrology," *Augustinian Studies* 30 (1999): 83–103. The latter study demonstrates that Augustine did not take a firm anti-astrology position until late in his priesthood, i.e., around the time that he was coming under scrutiny for his irregular interests and involvements; prior to ca. 395 C.E. Augustine "did not see the rebuttal of astrology as an urgent concern for him personally" (O'Laughlin, "Development," 88). O'Laughlin notes the degree to which Augustine's description of his supposed break with astrology in Milan in *Conf.* 7.6.8 is colored by much later ruminations on the issue (O'Laughlin, "*Libri Philosophorum*," 120 n. 96).

30. For a documented case of a Manichaean including a magical spell in his correspondence, see Paul Mirecki, Iain Gardner, Anthony Alcock, "Magical Spell, Manichaean Letter," in Paul Mirecki and Jason BeDuhn, eds., *Emerging from Darkness: Studies in the Recovery of Manichaean Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 1–32.

31. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.17.20; 3.24.28.

the *Confessions*, and Petilian's charges fit that later context. If Megalius made any accusation at all related to this point, it is most likely to have been a broad one questioning the motivation and authenticity of Augustine's conversion, rather than a challenge to his baptism *per se*.

Fourth, Petilian claimed that Augustine had been a Manichaean presbyter, distributing the eucharist to the Elect.[32] It is quite clear that Augustine never attained such a rank in the Manichaean community, and the accusation in part rests upon a misunderstanding of Manichaean ritual. As a Manichaean Auditor, Augustine had indeed brought food offerings to the Elect. As far as we know, the Manichaeans had no separate eucharistic ceremony apart from this ritual meal, although Augustine himself appears to suggest some sort of separate eucharist rite among the Elect to which he had never been privy.[33] Augustine himself was of the opinion that this charge was based upon a misunderstanding of his own effusive use of gustatory metaphors in the *Confessions*;[34] if this is so, it is unlikely to rely upon anything Megalius wrote. We cannot rule out the possibility, however, that Megalius repeated accusations about Augustine's past as a Manichaean that may have exaggerated his status in the community.

Fifth, Petilian contended that Augustine's monastic institution in Carthage was a secret Manichaean cell.[35] Given the novelty of such monastic communities in Africa at the time, it would not be surprising if Megalius raised concerns about the group around Augustine that had relocated with him from Thagaste to Hippo with the accommodation of bishop Valerius.[36] E. Lamirande, following W. H. C. Frend, points to the large number of former Manichaeans entering into the Catholic priesthood at this time and the lasting suspicion that Manichaean cells honeycombed the African Catholic church.[37] It seems likely that Megalius's letter *against* Augustine actually was addressed *to* Valerius, and took the

32. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.17.20.
33. *Fort.* 1.3.
34. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.17.20.
35. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.40.48.
36. Ascetic groups were closely associated with Manichaeism in the public imagination, as attested by Jerome, *Ep.* 48, and in imperial edicts such as *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.7 (381 C.E.) and 16.5.9 (382 C.E.).
37. Lamirande in Finaert and Lamirande, *Traités Anti-Donatistes*, vol. 5, 711–12. Cf. W. H. C. Frend, "Manichaeism in the Struggle between Saint Augustine and Petilian of Constantine," *Augustinus Magister* (Congrès International Augustinien, Paris, 21.–24. Septembre 1954), vol. 2 (Paris, 1954), 859–66; Quinot in Finaert and Quonot, *Traités Anti-Donatistes*, vol. 3, 570 n. 1.

form of a complaint against the bishop for his poor judgment in favoring Augustine and catering to his innovations. Augustine later wrote a letter on the occasion of Megalius's death which displays a serious rift between the traditional Catholic leaders of Megalius's generation and the young men around Augustine who faced unpleasant suspicions and criticisms from their elders in the Church connected to both their dubious past and attempts at innovation.[38]

While we have no way to know for sure which of these specific charges formed part of Megalius's attack on Augustine, we can be confident that the general context of the primate's concern was Augustine's Manichaean associations. Megalius's letter was consistently brought up by Augustine's Donatist opponents in the context of accusations that he was a crypto-Manichaean, and when it was mentioned for the last time at the Conference of Carthage, Augustine replied by swearing that he was truly a Catholic. We need to obtain a better understanding of this atmosphere of suspicion regarding Augustine within the Catholic community itself, and why it proved so difficult for Augustine to free himself of it, by taking seriously what those around him such as Megalius knew or thought they knew about his association with Manichaeism.

AUGUSTINE'S QUESTIONABLE PAST

Augustine had never made any secret of the fact that he had once been a Manichaean. The questions that were repeatedly raised concerned when exactly, and under what conditions, he had ceased to be one, if he ever had. If we trace Augustine's conduct and movements in the decade from 382 C.E., when he was well-known in Carthage as a Manichaean, to 391 C.E., when he was involuntarily conscripted as a Catholic priest in Hippo, we can see why suspicions circulated around him.

Augustine had made Carthage his home for more than a decade, most of that time as a Manichaean. He had settled into a comfortable life as a teacher, with a common-law wife, a child, other dependents, a circle of pupils, and close ties of friendship within the Manichaean community. He was an active public debater in the Manichaean cause, and had even become a literary advisor to the Manichaean bishop Faustus. In the summer

38. *Ep.* 38. The promotion of monasticism by Augustine and his colleagues fell under the cloud of the anti-ascetic backlash that followed the circulation of Jerome's excessive *Contra Jovinianum* in 393 C.E..

of 383 C.E., Augustine suddenly left Carthage for Rome—so suddenly, in fact, as he later publicly apologized to his patron Romanianus, that he abandoned his obligation of guardianship and left "your children, deserted by their teacher . . . in your absence and without your knowledge."[39] He even left his own mother, literally, at the docks.[40] The coincidence of this swift departure with a major shift in government policy towards Manichaeans is too strong to ignore.

A series of imperial edicts issued between 381 and 383 C.E. had made it increasingly untenable to be a Manichaean within the Roman Empire.[41] Not all of these laws would have been published in Africa, and enforcement would have been irregular.[42] But Augustine alludes to the constraint of secrecy placed upon Manichaean meetings in the latter years of his association with the sect due to such legislation.[43] The net effect of these laws deprived Manichaeans of all legal rights and property, opened them to delation (an accusation without legal risk by any informer), and made them subject to exile or execution. Those who had converted to Manichaeism from Catholicism, and who encouraged others to do the same, were particularly singled out for the severest punishment. Augustine was guilty of both offenses. By his own account and estimation, he was a well-known debater and recruiter on the Manichaean side.[44]

39. *Acad.* 2.2.3.

40. *Conf.* 5.8.15.

41. *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.7 to Eutropius, PPO Illyrici, Italiae et Africae, May 8, 381 C.E.; *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.9 to Florus, PPO Orientis, March 31, 382 C.E.; *Cod. Theod.* 16.7.3 to Flavius Hypatius, PPO Italiae et Illyrici, May 21, 383 C.E.; *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.11 to Postumianus, PPO Orientis, July 25, 383 C.E.. For a close examination of these three laws, see Per Beskow, "The Theodosian Laws against Manichaeism," in Peter Bryder, ed. *Manichaean Studies. Proceedings of the First International Conference on Manichaeism, August 5–9, 1987, Department of History of Religions, Lund University, Sweden* (Lund: Plus Ultra, 1988), 1–11.

42. Africa fell under the jurisdiction of the PPO Italiae et Illyrici, and laws issued to that officer were published for enforcement in Africa (a contemporaneous example being *Cod. Theod.* 11.16.13 issued to Syagrius, the predecessor of Hypatius, after the close of the sailing season in 382 C.E. and published in Carthage after the reopening of the sea lanes, on April 13, 383 C.E., a mere month before the issuing of the anti-Manichaean *Cod. Theod.* 16.7.3).

43. *Mor.* 2.19.69.

44. Note that in considering Augustine's motives for leaving Africa and his reaction to the anti-Manichaean laws it is more relevant how prominent and well-known of a Manichaean he considered himself to be than how much he actually was. Augustine repeatedly characterizes himself as a notorious Manichaean debater in the public sphere in Carthage.

The arrival of any of these laws in Carthage would have made life very dangerous for Augustine. The new laws made it possible for any enemy of his, or even a disgruntled pupil, to accuse him without risk. He had a wife and child to think of. He had to leave Carthage, and he hints that his fellow Manichaeans urged him to do so.[45] His departure from Africa occurred in the summer of 383 C.E., closely coinciding with the issuing (on May 21, 383 C.E.) of the second anti-Manichaean edict we are certain would have been published in Africa, because issued to the Praetorian Prefect who had Africa within his jurisdiction.[46]

Rome was a logical place of refuge: it was a huge city in which Augustine was totally unknown, with a large Manichaean community that could shelter him, and a deeply rooted civic climate disinclined to the new fanaticism of the imperial court reflected in the legislation. Because of the new laws, Augustine tells us, the Manichaeans there were forced to carry on their religious life "unobtrusively"; but the pagan urban prefect Q. Aurelius Symmachus seems to have given them a level of protection, and the community was sizable.[47] Given the open opposition of Symmachus to the religious policy of the court in Milan, it is no surprise that he ignored edicts on religion entirely, and made Rome a refuge of those faiths outside of imperial favor. At this time there would have been few to foresee that the new edicts marked a permanent and irreversible change in religion within the empire. It would be natural for those in positions of power to assume the wind would shift again at imperial whim, as it had so many times for the last century, and this assumption would moderate very rigid enforcement of any edict. Local politics and civil order would have priority over declarations from the court that often must have been all but incomprehensible, not to mention vague on application, to the average magistrate.

When Augustine made his decision to flee, he acted immediately. He left everyone behind without warning or preparation, and secretly boarded a ship for Rome with unnamed traveling companions—likely to have been Manichaeans known to the Roman community who could vouch for Augustine. When he arrived in Rome, gravely ill,[48] he was taken into the home of a prominent Manichaean patron, where he remained for a year.[49]

45. *Conf.* 5.8.14.
46. *Cod. Theod.* 16.7.3, issued to Flavius Hypatius, PPO Italiae et Illyrici.
47. *Conf.* 5.10.19.
48. *Conf.* 5.9.16.
49. *Conf.* 5.10.18–19.

Augustine himself mentions that he never even considered baptism during this near fatal episode.[50] He was set up as a teacher, actively continued to participate in Manichaean religious life, and associated exclusively with fellow Manichaeans.[51] They helped arrange his appointment as rhetor of the imperial capital of Milan in the fall of 384 C.E. as part of a significant shift of the court towards a more religiously liberal position.[52] There, with his Manichaean connections carefully concealed, he was able to set up a new life, rejoined by his family and wards.[53]

Back in Africa, there was a delay of two years before the anti-Manichaean laws began to be enforced;[54] this delay would be crucial to Augustine's later self-defense. The proconsul Eusignius, later part of the religiously liberal court in Milan, did not act on the laws, nor did his immediate successor.[55] But in 385 C.E. Theodosius took effective control of Africa,

50. *Conf.* 5.9.16.

51. Of such activity, J. O'Donnell remarks that, "it is a sign of how involved in the movement he still was, whatever his doubts" (J. O'Donnell, *Confessions* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992], 2:313). Augustine still found the crude anthropomorphism of Christianity unpalatable (*Conf.* 5.10.19), and the Christian scriptures unreadable (*Conf.* 5.11.21).

52. On this political reaction against the growing power of the Catholic camp, see J.-R. Palanque, *S. Ambroise et l'empire romain, contribution à l'histoire des rapports de l'Église et de l'État à la fin du IV e siècle* (Paris: E. De Boccard, 1933), 130, and P. Courcelle, *Recherches*, 79–80. The latter finds it significant that Augustine's first public speech in his new position was a panegyric of Bauto, who had close connections with Symmachus (Symmachus, *Ep.* 4.15), delivered in the immediate aftermath of Symmachus being cleared of false charges of arresting and torturing Catholic clerics in Rome (Symmachus, *Relatio* 21), and the consequent issuing of an edict declaring sacrilege any criticism of those holding appointments from the court (*Cod. Theod.* 1.6.9, December 28, 384 C.E., only a few days before Augustine's speech). He also notes that Augustine makes no mention of this panegyric in the *Confessions*, but only refers to it when forced to in order to prove against the accusations of Petilian that he was already in Milan at the time of the crackdown on Manichaeans in Africa.

53. Augustine thought he had successfully concealed his Manichaeism from Ambrose, who praised Monnica to him apparently not knowing that Augustine did not share her beliefs (*Conf.* 6.2.2), and to whom Augustine finally confessed his past errors in a letter in October 386 C.E. (*Conf.* 9.5.13).

54. This delay in enforcement may have been related to the political uncertainties of their continued validity following the death of Gratian in August 383 C.E.. But no special circumstances were necessary for imperial edicts to be negligently and indifferently enforced.

55. Eusignius, originally an appointee of Gratian, was part of the circle of officials that rallied around Valentinian II in Milan in the wake of Gratian's overthrow, and as praetorian prefect of Italy was a key part of the religious liberalization policy of the western court that reversed course from the direction Theodosius had been set-

appointing Gildo as military commander and Messianus as proconsul.[56] Thus Messianus could be expected to belong to the more zealous camp around the eastern emperor. The arrival of Messianus in Africa marked a significant shift in enforcement of the Manichaean edicts, and he may even have enforced laws issued by Theodosius for the eastern part of the empire. Before then the Manichaean bishop Faustus had been able to operate with relative freedom in Carthage, whereas under Messianus he was arrested.[57] Accused by Christians in Carthage by delation, and condemned to death by the proconsul, his sentence was commuted to exile on an island. Augustine got away well before trouble started, and this would allow him later to plausibly disconnect the two events of his departure and the anti-Manichaean program of Messianus.

During the trials conducted by Messianus, one of Augustine's former Manichaean associates "named names" in an effort to shift blame away from himself, and Augustine was listed in absentia as a Manichaean, perhaps even as an active proselytizer, in the official acts.[58] As much as Augustine might complain about the prejudgment involved in condemning him simply for being accused without a trial,[59] Messianus apparently issued a warrant or judgment that included Augustine either explicitly or implicitly given the appearance of his name in the official acts. Petilian had claimed of Augustine, the latter relates, that "the *sententia* of the proconsul Messianus hit me so hard that I fled Africa."[60] Word of this warrant would have reached Augustine in the summer in 386 C.E., about the same time

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ting in the east. There would be no further anti-Manichaean legislation in the west until Theodosius himself was on the scene in 389 C.E..

56. On the date of Messianus's consulship, see F. Decret, *L'Afrique manichéenne* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978), 1:216, and 2:164 n. 34, who notes that Augustine specifies the time of action taken against Manichaeans in Africa as *after* the consulship of Bauto, which extended through the year 385 C.E.. Augustine notes that the date on the official *gesta* of the anti-Manichaean hearings named the consuls subsequent to Bauto's term (*Manicheos autem Messianus proconsul audierit post consulatum Bautonis, sicut dies gestorum ab eodem Petiliano insertus ostendit*, *C. litt. Pet.* 3.25.30), placing the proceedings in the early months of 386 C.E..

57. *Faust.* 5.8.

58. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.16.19: *ignotorum mihi et notorum gesta recitet damnatorum et, quod ibi amicus quondam meus magis ad defensionem suam me nominauit absentem.*

59. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.16.19: *in calumniam praeiudicanti criminis nescio quo nouo et suo iure conuertat.*

60. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.25.30: *Messiani proconsularis sententia me fuisse percussum, ut ex Africa fugerem.*

that news arrived of the very first execution of "Manichaeans" (actually the Spanish holy man Priscillian and some of his associates, on the charges of Manichaeism and magic, both of which appear to have been false) at the court of Maximus at Trier.[61]

Once again, Augustine took sudden, unexpected action not usually looked at in this political context. He slipped out of the city during the autumn holidays, and withdrew to a private estate. From that safe distance, he resigned his position on the excuse of ill-health (whatever its truth, a well-known ploy of politically-advisable retirement) and wrote to bishop Ambrose and "notified him of my past errors," i.e., as a Manichaean, "and of my present intention," i.e., to formally convert to Catholicism (this would have been in mid-October 386 C.E.).[62] Baptism at his relatively young age was comparatively rare at this time, but the only way to put him out of danger under the circumstances. Yet as quickly as danger had pursued him, it departed with the issuing of a general amnesty (the *uota publica* of Theodosius and Arcadius of January 387 C.E.) that freed the Manichaean exiles, Faustus among them, and would have negated the warrant against Augustine.[63] This allowed him to return to Milan in safety and be baptized, and freed him to return to Africa, which he set out to do within the year.

One scarcely needed special reasons to leave Milan in the face of the approaching armies of Maximus, as he moved to seize Italy from Valentinian II in the summer of 387 C.E.. His reputation as a self-avowed killer of Manichaeans—even of individuals such as Priscillian who energetically denied the charge and professed a Catholic faith, condemned for past deeds and statements—could only add an extra element of urgency to Augustine's

61. Maximus claimed in a letter to bishop Siricius of Rome that in executing Priscillian and some of his associates he had suppressed a Manichaean cell (*Collectio Avellana* 40). On the case of Priscillian, see Virginia Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority, and the Priscillianist Controversy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

62. *Conf.* 9.5.13. One notes with regret and curiosity that this letter is missing from Augustine's preserved correspondence, despite the fact that the collection starts with other letters of 386 C.E..

63. The amnesty declared, in part: *et unde publica terrenorum principum uota per indulgentiam solent relaxare damnatos. denique non multo post inde omnes eadem solemni sorte dimissi sunt*. The relevance of this amnesty to the fate of the Manichaeans condemned by Messianus was first noted by P. Monceaux, *Le manichéen Faustus de Milev, restitution de ses Capitula*, Extrait des Mémoires de l'Academie des Inscriptions et des belles lettres 43 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1924), 3; see also Decret, *L'Afrique*, 217.

decision, even as a now baptized Catholic. He stayed in the relative safety of Rome again for a full year, finally returning to Carthage in the late summer of 388 C.E., where he remained for some time, perhaps another full year, only adding to suspicions against him by leaving the city at about the same time that a new anti-Manichaen edict issued by Theodosius was published.[64] This time, he withdrew to his family property in Thagaste.

Of course the parallels between aggressive steps taken by the Roman government against the Manichaeans and Augustine's movements are entirely circumstantial. But let us for the moment forget that we are talking about Augustine. Let us treat him momentarily as we would any other historical figure. For a decade, the person in question is an avid Manichaean, often engaging in public polemic against Catholicism. But in the wake of severe laws issued against Manichaeans, he quite suddenly leaves Carthage where he is well known as a Manichaean, and goes to Rome, where he is unknown and which is under an administration uninterested in enforcing the anti-Manichaean laws. Once the continuity of the person's Manichaean commitment on both sides of the Mediterranean is confirmed, as it is by his own testimony, then all of his subsequent actions fall under a cloud of suspicion of being motivated by the desire to preserve both his life and his faith. His subsequent movements closely match the ebb and flow of persecution and tolerance, or news of the same, directed towards Manichaeans.

It would be considered a perfectly reasonable interpretation of this historical data that the figure in question has been ushered around the map by a sequence of political shifts involving potential risk to Manichaeans or former Manichaeans, doing his best to stay one step ahead of danger. His external, visible conduct in this sequence of decisions would be taken to reveal his perception of his own vulnerability to prosecution, and perhaps even a continued identification with the proscribed Manichaean sect. His timely retirement from urban centers where he was well known to either the anonymity of a big city or remote towns and estates would be seen as part of a typical tactic taken by those in trouble politically and legally. His baptism would likely be seen as an act of expediency and convenience under the circumstances. Indeed, given the recent triumphs of Ambrose and the Catholic camp in Milan over even the emperor, Augustine and

64. *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.18 of June 17, 389 C.E.. Since it was issued to the Prefect of Rome, not to the Praetorian Prefect, one might doubt that it would be intended for publication and enforcement elsewhere; yet Ambrose reports knowledge and enforcement of it in Milan (Ambrose, *Ep.* 44/42.13).

his fellow candidates for baptism in the spring of 387 C.E. "might well have seemed, to uncharitably onlookers, to be passengers belatedly leaping aboard a bandwagon."[65]

Augustine's behavior was certainly viewed with these suspicions by many of his contemporaries, including prominent Donatist and Catholic leaders, and even some of his former Manichaean associates.[66] At the very least, we should now appreciate why such suspicions about him were not entirely unreasonable, and so understand how they could be perpetuated for so long among so many. The degree to which modern biographers of Augustine have not recognized or appreciated, to the same extent that his contemporaries did, the correlations between his actions and the particular pressures applied at the time to Manichaeans reflects Augustine's success in taking control of his own historical portrait in the *Confessions*. The very success of that work in shaping our picture of Augustine's life has obscured from us the circumstances in which Augustine may have been compelled to "confess" in the first place.

RESPONDING TO MEGALIUS

The scant attention given to these accusations in modern Augustinian scholarship reflects Augustine's stature and the common, teleologically-biased assumption against his detractors. The inclination to dismiss them as the intemperate slash-and-burn polemic of the schismatic Petilian is inconvenienced by the fact that some of them, or accusations in some way like them, were made initially from within Catholic ranks and given credence by no less a personage than the Primate of Numidia. Nor should we be lulled into thinking that these were trivial matters. Petilian's set of accusations include the fatal triad of Manichaeism, magic, and sexual immorality that had doomed Priscillian of Avila in 386 C.E..[67] If Megalius's charges

65. Neil McLynn, "Seeing and Believing: Aspects of Conversion from Antoninus Pius to Louis the Pious," 224–70 in K. Mills and A. Grafton, eds., *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 258.

66. E.g., the Manichaean Secundinus, in his letter to Augustine, which after long neglect has now benefitted from two excellent English translations: I. Gardner and S. N. C. Lieu, *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 136–42; R. Teske and B. Ramsey, *The Manichaean Debate* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006), 357–62.

67. See Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic*, 94ff. Burrus analyzes the context of the late fourth century west "in which Priscillian's asceticism, his eclectic reading habits, . . . and his predilection for small group meetings lent plausibility to Hydatius' dam-

possessed the same sweep of issues, Augustine's life literally would have been on the line. But even if his life was not in immediate jeopardy, his character and integrity, as well as his already prominent place in the African Catholic community, were threatened with ruin.[68]

In such circumstances, how should Augustine respond? A letter written by Augustine to another former Manichaean, now also a Catholic bishop, on the occasion of Megalius's death in 397 C.E., while notably taciturn in its expression, nevertheless displays deep and bitter resentment towards the primate for what he had put Augustine through.[69] From what Augustine says elsewhere about such matters, we know that he considered questions about the state of his soul nobody's business but his own. How much should he admit of the things now being raised against him? How could he best dismiss the suspicions about his motivations and intentions in those questioned missing years of his life out of Africa? Augustine knew that his conversion had been sincere. We can argue about what he converted to; that was an unfolding thing for him. But he knew that he was not a fraud, that he was not a crypto-Manichaean as his accusers said he was. The way Augustine sets about defending himself, however, appears to confirm that there were damning facts about his past that were impossible for him to deny. It appears that he weighed the ethics of his predicament, trying to decide how honest and forthcoming he should be given his earnest commitment to the moral teachings of the Catholic Church. It is impossible to overlook how much the ethics of lying occupied his reflections at precisely the time he was being challenged by Megalius to give an account of his own past conduct.

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aging suggestion that the 'false bishop' was a Manichaean merely masquerading as an orthodox Christian" (49). Augustine's remarkably similar profile and context bears noting.

68. It is worth noting that the aggressive Donatist offensive against Augustine and other former Manichaeans among the Catholic leadership was launched in the immediate aftermath of the issuance of a new imperial edict against the Manichaeans in Africa, *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.35, issued from Milan in the name of the emperors Honorius and Arcadius to the military vicar of Africa on May 17, 399 C.E..

69. *Ep.* 38, written to Profuturus, a former Manichaean associate and now bishop of Cirta, in 397 C.E.. He seeks in guarded language to caution Profuturus against making an issue out of the sort of suspicions and accusations the two of them had experienced at the hands of the older generation of more conservative Catholic bishops. Henry Chadwick remarks on the contents of this letter that, "Megalius's withdrawal and apology for his letter and willingness to consecrate Augustine at Hippo had not wholly healed the scar" (Henry Chadwick, "On Re-reading the Confessions," in F. LeMoine and C. Kleinhenz, eds., *Saint Augustine the Bishop: A Book of Essays* [New York: Garland, 1994], 159 n. 48).

Chief among the products of these reflections is the *De mendacio*, a private exploratory exercise never meant to be published, and at one point ordered destroyed.[70] Augustine offers no indication, either in the work itself or in the *Retractationes*, what prompted him to compose this remarkable work, which he only discovered had been preserved, despite his express instructions to the contrary, when the *Indicula* of his works was made in 427 C.E..[71] The historian is left to supply a plausible occasion for its composition in the circumstances of Augustine's life ca. 394–395 C.E., and once again we confront a historical correlation that we would not hesitate to cite in the case of any other historical figure: Megalius's charges and the demand that they be answered.

To understand the *De mendacio* one must recognize that for Augustine, at this stage of the development of his thought, the entire material, sensory world of things and actions is the realm of *mendacium*.[72] Truth is to be found only in the immaterial, intelligible dimension of reality. Everything we experience, everything we do in this life, belongs to something that masks and obscures what is true. While lying is sinful, therefore, it is simply a part of fallen, embodied life, whose opaque state closes off the secrets of one's mind and heart from examination by any other mortal.[73]

70. Text: *CSEL* 41:413–66; translations: *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 3, 457–77; M. S. Muldowney, in R. J. Deferrari, *Fathers of the Church, vol. 16: St. Augustine, Treatises on Various Subjects* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1952), 53–110.

71. The work is clearly informed by the position of Jerome on Paul's conflict with Peter reported in Galatians, set forth in Jerome's commentary on Galatians, which was obtained from Jerome himself by Augustine's friend Alypius in 393 C.E. as part of a concerted effort by Augustine and his circle to quickly get up to speed on Catholic exegesis of Paul in the wake of Augustine's shaky performance in this area in his public debate with the Manichaean Fortunatus in the late summer of 392 C.E.. Troubled by Jerome's reading of the passage, Augustine wrote to him twice to dispute the matter (*Ep*. 28 in 395 C.E., and *Ep*. 40 in 397 C.E.). Both letters got into wide circulation before Jerome ever received them, and Jerome would complain bitterly to Augustine about this (*Ep*. 72). Augustine apparently mistook the writing about which Jerome was complaining, and denied that he had ever *published* a "book" against Jerome, while acknowledging that he had *written* things containing elements contrary to Jerome's views (*Ep*. 67.2.2). Only later did he realize that Jerome meant one of his letters. By Jerome's reference to a "book," Augustine "had thought that you had heard of something or other absolutely different" (*Ep*. 82.4.33), apparently the *De mendacio*.

72. *Solil*. 2.9ff.

73. *Gn. adv. Man*. 2.22, 2.24, 2.32. The fall has replaced the initial transparency of being of the soul that leaves no space for deception with opaque embodiment, the "coverings of lying" (*cooperimenta mendacii*). According to *Quaest*. 47 of approxi-

The telling of complete truth is a moral ideal to which all mortals aspire by degrees of ascent in this life, along which there are more and less serious types of lying. There are many good reasons, he finds, that might seem to justify the harmless or even beneficial lie,[74] and he makes a sharp distinction between lying that involves matters of the faith, and lying in purely personal, temporal matters. He ponders whether a lie, "if it injured no one and benefitted someone, yet neither concealed nor defended any sin, should not be considered reprehensible" and not considered to constitute a breach of the commandment against bearing false witness.[75]

While he considers any such utterance of falsehood to be less than the ideal, he has no such reserve about omitting or withholding truth. Failing to supply the truth does not constitute lying.[76] Augustine fleshes out this position in his exposition of Psalm 5, composed during the same period.

> It is one thing to lie, another to cloak the truth, since it is one thing to say what is false, another to keep silent about what is true. If someone, for example, does not want to betray another person even to the death we can all see, he ought to be willing to conceal the truth, but not to tell a lie. This means that he neither betrays nor tells a lie, and avoids killing his own soul for the sake of another's body. But if he is not yet able to do this, then he should tell only those lies which are unavoidable.[77]

He repeats this sentiment in his *Expositio ad epistulam ad Galatas*, composed in the same circumstances as the *De mendacio* and his commentary on Psalm 5: "Under no circumstances is it lawful to tell a lie, but occasionally it is helpful to be silent about some aspect of the truth."[78] Some people, he thinks, are in no condition to handle the truth responsibly. "But when the person who interrogates you or wishes to know anything from you seeks that which does not concern him, or which is not expedient for him to know, he craves not a witness, but a betrayer."[79] He observes that even Christ concealed the truth when he refused to tell the disciples all that he knew (John 16.12), as did Paul when he said the Corinthians were not yet ready to hear all of his teachings (1 Cor 3.1). "From this it is clear that it

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mately the same time, this original transparency of being by which each other's thoughts would be directly known would be restored in the ethereal, angelic bodies made of light that the saved would possess after the resurrection.

74. *De mend.* 11.18–12.19.
75. *De mend.* 12.20.
76. *De mend.* 13.22.
77. *Psal.* 5.7.
78. *Gal.* 10.4.
79. *De mend.* 17.36.

is not culpable sometimes to keep the truth quiet."[80] For "he cannot lie in his heart who through his speech so expresses something other than what is in his mind that he knows he is doing evil solely for the sake of avoiding a greater evil, and knows that both are repugnant to him."[81]

We should note that, in his various discussions of lying as a moral issue, Augustine repeatedly counted himself among the imperfect who still resort to lies, even if mainly of the "little white" variety. Of course Augustine sharply distinguishes the vulnerability of his own writings to error and falsehood from purity and perfection of scripture.[82] He considers himself among the imperfect who can only aspire to reach a state where they will be free of lying, as the biblical authors were.[83] In *Sermon Dolbeau* 10/162C, which has been dated to 397 C.E., he again includes himself among the

80. *Psal.* 5.7.

81. *De mend.* 16.31.

82. "It is, of course, one question whether good men ought to lie at some time, and it is another question whether a writer of the holy scriptures ought to lie" (*Ep.* 28.3.3). In the case of the famous confrontation between Peter and Paul, Augustine is not concerned about either man acting falsely before the Christians of Antioch, but only about Paul falsely representing the content of his thought in what he wrote. Initially objecting to the proposition that the confrontation between Paul and Peter was just an act, he goes on to say that Peter indeed only pretended to agree with the position of those from James. Since Peter never wrote claiming that his conduct was in earnest, we are free to conjecture his inner state of mind; but since Paul did write claiming that his rebuke was forthright, this must be the truth. To doubt Paul's word would open up questions about the veracity of all scripture (*Serm. Dolb.* 10/162C.14; cf. *Serm. Dolb.* 12/354A.8, from the same period, where the same possible argument is vetted).

83. "Everything written in the holy canonical books, well, we who engage in public debates and write books write in a very different fashion; we make progress as we write, we are learning every day, engaged in research as we dictate, knocking at the door as we speak. . . . What of course we would prefer, and this would be our choice between the two options, is that in writing or speaking we should always say what is true, never go wrong. But since this is difficult to achieve, that's why there is this other firmament of the canon" (*Serm. Dolb.* 10/162C.15, translation by Edmund Hill, *Sermons III/11*, The Works of Saint Augustine, A Translation for the 21st Century [New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1997], 176). In *Psal.* 5 from the same period, Augustine discusses the case of the Hebrew midwives who lied to the Egyptians to save the lives of the children. He says that they were justified in what they did, albeit acting imperfectly in lying; by the goodness of their intentions, they will ultimately deserve the reward of existing in a state above all lying: "But even such things are praised not because of what happened but for the presence of mind shown. Why so? Because those who lie only in this way will deserve one day to be freed from lying altogether, for in those who are perfect, not even lies of that sort are to be found" (*Psal.* 5.7).

imperfect whom God sees lying in this life.[84] Progress in avoiding lies marks a path of ascent towards a perfect honesty and transparency of mind to all that is only fully achieved outside of this world. In *Quaest*. 53, from this period, Augustine explores "by what stages of development one attains to this height and perfection" of being perfectly honest, and acknowledges that "there is a level of virtue which involves deceiving certainly neither friend nor passerby, though, at times, one's enemy." God makes use of the imperfect who still yield to degrees of deception in order to have those deceived who deserve to be. Likewise in *Serm*. 28A/Dolbeau 9, reminding his audience that scripture declares "every man is a liar" (Ps 116.11; Rom 3.4), he contends that we are, in ourselves, inherently liars, but become more truthful the closer we approach God who "alone is truthful" (Rom 3.4).[85] This ascent involves an interiorization of selfhood, away from the external realm of *mendacium*.

> When will man ever be truthful? "Approach him and be enlightened" (Ps 34.5). So this is what scripture wished to demonstrate, that every human being, absolutely every single one, as regards being merely human, is a liar. Man is not a liar except from what is his own (cf. John 8.44); that is, from the body which consists of earthy matter. For the soul is divine, and with it he is truthful, not a liar. Nor is he able from what is his own, to be anything but a liar . . .[86]

The soul's inner connection to its divine creator (which is certainly all that Augustine means here), nurtured by "participation in truth," radically separates it from the "dark" world of material reality, with all its dubious

84. *Serm. Dolb*. 162C.3.

85. *Serm*. 28A.2.

86. Hill, *Sermons III/11*, 54 n. 3 has challenged a portion of this passage ("that is, from the body which consists of earthy matter. For the soul is divine, and with it he is truthful, not a liar") as "a clause which cannot possibly have been spoken by Augustine, but which must represent the marginal comment of a misguided copyist, whose bad theology was that of what one may call a coarse Platonist." The offending clause is missing from Bede's quotation of this part of the sermon. But Augustine at this stage of his thinking was quite capable of expressing himself this way, which was consistent with his understanding of the soul's descent into material existence. For this use of John 8.44—originally spoken about the devil—as the definition of human lying as speaking from one's own resources, see also *Serm*. 166.3. Augustine's reading of this verse has been colored by Plotinus's emphasis on individuation and self-reliance (or, for Augustine, *proprium*) as the key to turning from God and falling into time and matter (Plotinus, *En*. 6.4–5). Cf. *Gen. Man*.. 2.22: "Whoever, therefore, is turned away from that truth, and turned toward himself . . . is darkened over with lying."

facticity. To the degree that we are engaged in the concerns of this world, to that degree we are entangled in lies.

Ideally, one should never lie; yet the conditions of the fallen world are such that we may find ourselves compelled to lie—by commission or omission—in order to avoid circumstances in which even graver sins would be committed.[87] What greater evil would Augustine be avoiding by any half-truths in his response to Megalius? Quite simply, because Augustine was not, as his accusers claimed, a crypto-Manichaean, to confess things that might circumstantially support such a false accusation would imperil Augustine as an innocent man. His situation was tantamount to that of the person being unjustly pursued by the authorities he brings up in *De mendacio*, which in his opinion justifies the withholding of information regarding the wrongfully accused.[88] Saving one's own life for the greater good provides the only fully justifiable exception to the admirable ideal of never telling a lie, regardless of the consequences.[89]

It apparently has caught little notice that when Augustine was proposing these ethical scenarios it was primarily Manichaeans, not Catholics, who found themselves pursued by the law in the manner he imagines. When pagans had been in power, the Christian Origen had found it expedient to offer sacrifice. To what expediency under a Catholic regime did Augustine intend to compare this incident in justifying it? Indeed, he says in the *Confessions* that as a Manichaean he taught his associates the rhetorical art of making a legal defense by any means necessary, while refusing to have anything to do with the legal art of accusation.[90] One wonders, if the *De mendacio* had fallen into the hands of Megalius, whether the primate might well have considered it a handbook for crypto-Manichaeism, confirming his worst suspicions. Augustine ordered it destroyed after the exercise of its deliberations had served its purpose for him. That order of destruction certainly reflects a concern on his part that he had been indiscreet in some fashion in it; but it was a passing anxiety that faded once the crisis had passed. When he rediscovered the work late in life he seems to have had trouble recalling precisely what he had intended in writing it.[91] He was no longer that hunted and harassed man.

87. *De mend.* 17.35, 18.39.
88. *De mend.* 13.22.
89. *De mend.* 17.36.
90. *Conf.* 4.2.2.
91. *Retract.* 1.26.

An episcopal commission (*episcoporum concilio*;[92] *sancto concilio*[93]) was formed to look into Megalius's allegations, and it was to that body that Augustine would have had to make some sort of formal response. His reflections on his moral obligations in answering the commission now complete, he was prepared to explain himself. Knowing Augustine, his statement would have been carefully composed, full of rhetorical flourishes, and earnestly declare the authenticity of his conversion despite his admitted past error as a Manichaean. It would have explained his decision to leave Africa in his twenty-ninth year and accounted for his life in the years he was away from his homeland, especially the spiritual transformation that caused him to return five years later a baptized and active Catholic.

Where is this formal response? There seems to be nothing among Augustine's letters or his published writings that fits this purpose. Or is there? Does not *Confessions* books 5–9 fit this description, and is it not just the sort of answer Augustine must have given in order to dispel the allegations and gain Megalius's approval of his ordination?

AUGUSTINE THE CONFESSOR

The idea that accusations about Augustine's Manichaean associations served as the initial impetus behind the *Confessions* has been proposed before, most notably by Max Wundt.[94] Wundt drew attention to the barrage of charges against Augustine emanating from Donatist circles—Priminian, Petilian, and Cresconius—between 401 and 405 C.E.. Since Augustine's initial response to these attacks, circa 401 C.E., made no reference to the *Confessions*, but later responses did, Wundt argued that we could pinpoint the composition of the work in the midst of this controversy. Other Augustinian scholars have been reluctant to accept so late a date for the inception of the *Confessions*, although most agree that its completion and publication must fall somewhere near 401 C.E..[95] More

92. *Cresc.* 4.64.79.

93. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.16.19.

94. Max Wundt, "Augustins Konfessionen," *ZNW* 22 (1923): 161–206, developing a suggestion he had first made in "Zur Chronologie augustinischer Schriften," *ZNW* 21 (1922): 128–35.

95. Since Wundt, slightly later dates for the completed *Confessions* have been proposed from time to time that would bolster his position. Solignac finds plausibility in the idea that Wundt's scenario could explain not the entire work, but a later addition to it of book 10, with its references to previous readers and their doubts and questions about what he had written (*Les Confessions*, Bibliothèque Augustinienne,

specifically, Wundt's hypothesis has a number of problems that probably render it untenable, the most difficult of which is the fact that the *Confessions* simply does not address several of the most serious issues pressed by his Donatist opponents. If challenges to Augustine's baptism were the question, as they were in part in the Donatist accusations, Augustine's relegation of that event in the *Confessions* to a single, three-word sentence, not even being clear on who it was who baptized him, is scarcely fathomable. Only in later direct responses to Petilian and Cresconius does Augustine bring forward decisive new arguments not found in the *Confessions* that defend the validity of his baptism and answer accusations about his absence from Africa in the specific form in which they were now posing them.[96] While Wundt successfully identified common apologetic themes in the *Confessions* and in Augustine's initial response to Donatist attacks on him, his overall hypothesis has not proven persuasive.

Even though discussion of Augustine's defense against his Donatist accusers has always taken note of the references to the earlier criticism from Megalius, no one to my knowledge has suggested shifting Wundt's idea of an apologetic impetus for the *Confessions* back to the actual circumstance of Megalius's accusations. The closest association of the work to this circumstance proposed so far has been that made by Henry Chadwick. "The *Confessions* answer accusations,"[97] he avers, surveying the catalog of charges given by Petilian, but stressing the degree to which such concerns existed among "anxious Catholic critics needing reassurance about his

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Oeuvres de Saint Augustin 13 [Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962], 31). On the later addition of book 10, he joins the company of E. Williger, "Der Aufbau der Konfessionen Augustins," *ZNW* 28 (1929): 103ff.; Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches*, 25ff.; John O'Meara, *The Young Augustine* (London: Longman, 1954), 15ff., among others. Most recently, Pierre-Marie Hombert, *Nouvelles recherches de chronologie augustinienne* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 2000), 9–23, has revisited the question and argued in favor of a gradual composition of the *Confessions*, not completed until after the confrontation with Donatist critics in 401–403 C.E.. But Hombert's position does not resolve the difficulties faced by Wundt's original hypothesis, and depends on the assumption that Augustine left unredacted earlier portions of the work that would have already proved vulnerable to Donatist criticism.

96. Admittedly, we are missing the details of the initial charges leveled by Priminian and referred to by Augustine in *Psal.* 36 (3) in terms remarkably close to *Conf.*, book 10, and we cannot rule out the possibility that they did not yet include those matters brought up by Petilian and Cresconius later and responded to in turn. Nevertheless, the tenor of the *Conf.* is dramatically different than those sharply worded and direct later responses, suggesting a very different context of composition.

97. Chadwick, "On Re-reading the Confessions," 145; cf. his *Saint Augustine: Confessions*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), ix.

past life,"[98] as attested most of all by Megalius's letter, and due in part to misgivings about the emerging ascetic movement as an invasion of Manichaean values.[99] In line with Augustine's own dating of the *Confessions* to the period of his episcopate, Chadwick believes he was writing the work "as a recently consecrated bishop"[100] in order "to justify himself against those critics who judged him unsuitable for the episcopate,"[101] *after* the fact of his consecration. Yet Augustine would have had to satisfy some of those critics, most especially Megalius, *before* he could be consecrated. Once made aware of the suspicions circulating about him, he evidently made some initial answer to the episcopal commission appointed to investigate them that satisfied Megalius. The need for "self-vindication" that Chadwick sees behind the *Confessions* largely lost its force after Megalius and his fellow bishops had themselves vindicated Augustine in light of his testimony to them, and proceeded to ordain him. However much he elaborated and developed this initial response once the crisis had passed and he had become a bishop, there would have been no *Confessions* without the earlier response to his critics that enabled him to continue as a rising star in the Catholic Church.

That this earlier environment of accusation around Augustine is causatively related to the inception of the *Confessions* as a literary project is supported, therefore, by the following observations: (1) we know that during the time of his priesthood people were raising questions about Augustine's past Manichaean associations, and in particular the persistence of those associations as a motivation for Augustine's actions between leaving Africa in 383 C.E. and returning in 388 C.E.; (2) he must have offered some formal accounting to the bishops looking into the questions; (3) the demand of providing some formal accounting of himself offers a plausible explanation for the confessional rhetorical form adopted in the work (regardless of how Augustine manipulates the concept of confession towards a deeper and more complex meaning); (4) his answer to the questions most likely to have been raised by Megalius would have covered much the same temporal ground as books 5–9 of the *Confessions*, and so would likely

98. Chadwick, "On Re-reading the Confessions," 152.

99. Chadwick, "On Re-reading the Confessions," 145.

100. Chadwick, "On Re-reading the Confessions," 150.

101. Chadwick, "On Re-reading the Confessions," 145. See the similar remarks of R. L. Ottley, *Studies in the Confessions of St. Augustine* (London: Robert Scott, 1919), 39: "The *Confessions* were apparently written soon after his elevation to the episcopate . . . , his object being to refute calumnies which were based on the notorious facts of his past career."

compare quite closely with the latter work in many places, while explaining his interest in giving expanded treatment to precisely this period of his life (and not just the event of conversion itself);[102] (5) many of the things he says in the *Confessions* appear to have their *raison d'être* in explaining a course of internal transformation towards Catholic faith that moved well ahead of apparent external conduct others may have observed in Augustine; (6) his approach in confessing to God closely tracks his views on the impenetrable privacy of the self and the illegitimacy and incapacity of all human-to-human accusation and inquiry expressed in other compositions dating to around 394–396 C.E.; and (7) the *Confessions*, whether in the part covered in books 5–9 or as a whole, is indeed a brilliant *apologia pro vita sua* that by its combination of frank confession of past error and exclusive claim on the inner truth of his soul offers the best defense Augustine could possibly have made to the kinds of things being suggested against him. If this was not in large part the defense he offered to Megalius and the episcopal commission in 395 C.E., it is difficult to imagine what he had offered in its place.

We lack the sort of contemporaneous documentation, however, that could prove definitively that *Confessions* 5–9, or—more likely—some earlier form of the material now found in this part of the work, was originally composed as a statement to answer Megalius's allegations. We must work instead with traces of this background preserved in the *Confessions* itself as we now have it. There are peculiarities about the form book 5 takes that suggests that it was written before books 1–4 as the original opening of the work: its formal, proem-like opening with an apparent introduction of the theme of confession and oath-like identification of the specific year under discussion; its lavish treatment of a very short period of time compared with the earlier books; its lack of the themes and structuring devices characteristic of other parts of the work;[103] its independence of subject matter from, and lack of reference back to, the earlier books (including

102. On the need to account for the entire period of his absence from Africa, see Wundt, "Augustins Konfessionen," 178.

103. Annemarie Kotzé, *Augustine's Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 71 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 156–61, notes the relative absence in books 5 through 7 of the protreptic purpose enunciated throughout the rest of the work, which she argues supplies its governing intention in its final redaction. The more polemical thrust of abjuration stands in place of the more positive appeal of protreptic in this part of the work. These observations are consistent with the existence of an earlier version of these sections of the *Confessions* with a different purpose than its ultimate form.

certain redundancies). Why does Augustine give such rhetorical emphasis to reporting "in my God's presence, my twenty-ninth year," in which little else happens than his disappointment with the Manichaean leader Faustus, his sea voyage, and his continued life as a Manichaean in Rome? What was it about that year and what he did in it that is so important to his life story? Likewise, the end-point of his narrative in book 9 seems remarkably anti-climactic. Why not end with the famous garden scene marking his conversion at the end of book 8? Or with his baptism in the middle of book 9? Instead, Augustine keeps going, down to the port at Ostia from where he will take ship back to Africa. If, as he says several times, he must hurry his story along to get to its end,[104] why is it this end rather than a sooner one? Why did he need to get to this point? He appears to intend to cover precisely the period of his absence from Africa (although he still falls about a year short by omitting a second sojourn in Rome before he finally sailed for Africa), to give a full account of what he did and why during that time. Needless to say, such an account seems to have been an essential part of what was being sought from Augustine at the time the episcopal commission was looking into Megalius's charges.

We find another, somewhat less subjective, indication of an earlier layer in the *Confessions* in the repeated occurrence of passages reflecting the synergistic model of salvation by faith characteristic of his Pauline commentaries of 394–395 C.E., at odds with his new position on salvation by grace arrived at in the first year of his episcopacy in his *Ad Simplicianum*. The new paradigm of salvation manifests itself most strongly in books 1–4 (especially book 1) and 10–13 (especially book 10), while being all but absent from books 5–9. Indeed, the entire narrative thrust of the latter books depends upon the earlier construct of God's energetic call finally responded to by a willful act of faith on Augustine's part, which opens the floodgates of God's further aid. Of course, we must allow for some delay in Augustine's complete integration and consistent use of his new insights. But the fact that it is in the narrative of his Italian transformation that his post-397 C.E. thinking has taken least root points to the resistance of an established account and construal of those events that cannot be remolded easily to a new pattern.[105]

104. Such remarks might be taken to indicate an anxiety on his part that the episcopal commission would grow impatient with the excesses of the rhetorical performance by which he sought to take control of their more pointed inquiry.

105. For a full treatment of this subject, see my *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma: Making a Catholic Self in Late Fourth Century Africa* (forthcoming).

Despite such suggestive indications, whether books 5–9 of the *Confessions* is to be isolated as a separate, earlier composition from the rest of the work remains a debatable proposition, and one not necessary to resolve in order to acknowledge the strong external impetus for Augustine's act of confession.[106] Likewise, it is only a question of degree whether the *Confessions* preserves a substantial amount of the original wording or argument of his answer to Megalius, or whether he has later revisited his defense in new terms that preserves only fragments of his earlier statement amidst new additions (such as the biographical material on Alypius and Monnica).

Even if that first defense was in some ways simpler and more matter-of-fact than what we see in the *Confessions*, the circumstances of accusation still lingered in the immediate past, as Chadwick emphasizes, at the time when all modern researchers agree Augustine sat down to shape the work as we now have it. In no other composition we have from his pen does he address those questions about himself apparently on so many of his contemporaries' minds as personally and apologetically as he does in this work. The shadow of things known about him that he needed to answer for and explain hangs over it. It was conceived—at least initially—in adversity, as an urgent answer to questions about Augustine's life and character. Recognizing the seriousness of the situation in which he first drafted what would become the *Confessions* adds a significant new dimension to our appreciation of this work. No longer can we think of Augustine quietly meditating on his life, alone with God in the silence of his episcopal apartments. Instead, Augustine's searching inquiry into the truth about himself emerges from the clamor of others attempting to define him. He confesses to God not to inform God of anything, but to summon God to his side in his effort to escape the tyranny of the social construction of self.

We see the outcome of Augustine's preparatory deliberations on the ethics of confession in the way in which he sets about presenting himself in the *Confessions*, where he makes use of two complementary tactics. On one side, he freely confesses his error as something that is no longer against him now that his life has started over in Christ, disarming the reader with

106. Solignac, *Les Confessiones*, 46–48, puts forward reasons to believe that books 1–9 had at least a limited circulation before Augustine expanded the work to include books 10–13. It would not be out of character for Augustine to provide much more than was asked for in responding to the accusations about him, taking the opportunity to include the material of books 1–4 as background to contextualize the genuineness of his conversion against the stark antithesis of his juvenile faults, in imitation of countless such narratives in circulation at the time.

an apparently frank admission of past guilt. By freely confessing to all sorts of mundane, common human foibles, he takes on the role of the confessor and places himself in the sympathetic company of the penitents, distracting the reader from the more serious implications of his Manichaeism. On the other side, he shifts the realm of truth from the world of external deeds to the world of internal intentions, where no one can know the inner secrets of another's conscience or gainsay another's private commitments (most clearly and self-consciously enunciated in *Conf.* 10.3.4), and so the degree of any apparent guilt on Augustine's part can be dramatically reduced by revealing, on his own unimpeachable testimony, how far the state of his soul had outpaced the evidence of his observed conduct.[107]

It is here where we encounter Augustine's most characteristic turn on the issue, the interiority of truth. Because immaterial mind is superior to materially-engaged deed, the truth about the past resides in memory, rather than actual events. "For from the sense of his own mind, not from the verity or falsehood of the things themselves, is he to be judged to lie or not to lie."[108] Morally speaking, one's truthfulness is a matter of the honest reportage of how one remembers events, regardless of what actually occurred. This means that the perspective of hindsight might fundamentally transform what Augustine regarded as his true past. The immediate circumstances and motives of his conduct at the time may no longer be the truth of his past in light of where his conduct had ultimately led him, and the person he had ultimately become.

Being true to who he now was, therefore, might require reconsidering what he thought he was doing in the past, and denying the circumstances and motives his enemies wished to highlight. His motivations at the time were remote and disconnected from the outcomes that followed, and impossible even for himself to know or understand fully.[109] The fact that he had continued to be a practicing Manichaean after leaving Africa was for him a trivial detail overshadowed by the internal truth of his doubts and reservations. It was the latter that pointed in the direction of his future,

107. He repeats this same tactic in responding to his later Donatist accusers, freely condemning (without details) everything he did before his baptism (*C. litt. Petil.* 3.10.11), and pointedly asserting only his post-baptismal innocence of the charges (*C. litt. Petil.* 3.2.3), while rejecting the right of any human tribunal to judge him (*C. litt. Petil.* 3.2.3), since no one but himself is in a position to know his conscience or the state of his soul (*C. litt. Petil.* 3.10.11).

108. *De mend.* 3.3: *Ex animi enim sui sententia, non ex rerum ipsarum veritate vel falsitate mentiens aut non mentiens judicandus est.*

109. *De mend.* 17.36; cf. *Serm.* 50.2.3; *Secund.* 17.

while the former marked an identity that was fading away and proved ultimately irrelevant to the question not of what he seemed to be in the past, but of who he actually was.

This position develops an idea found already in the *De magistro* about the interposition of memory between people and the past.

> When a question arises not about what we sense before us, but about what we have sensed in the past, then we do not speak of the things themselves, but of images impressed from them on the mind and committed to memory. . . . We carry these images in the recesses of the memory as proofs of things sensed before. Contemplating them in the mind we tell no falsehood when we speak in good conscience . . .[110]

In a close analysis of this passage, Gareth Matthews has demonstrated that Augustine has different concerns about "truth" than we might expect.[111] For Augustine, the veracity of someone speaking from memory depends not on the accuracy of the memory with respect to the thing remembered, but on the accurate stating of what is remembered.[112] His position reflects his epistemology, by which what is known via the senses remains always uncertain. Whether something really is precisely as it appears to be through the senses, or as it is recalled to be by having those sensory impressions retained in the mind, is difficult to establish and ultimately irrelevant. What is "true" about something is what the mind thinks about it, since the mind is superior to sensory experience and has the benefit of its own inherent knowledge to make sense of things. Actual historical time is not as "true" for Augustine as memory and the truth accessed mentally by contact with the timeless intelligible. Therefore, the mind's contents function as "proofs" (*documenta*), and represent a step away from the senses and towards pure ideas. The further one goes along this chain, the closer one gets to truth. For this reason, the memory of a thing is not treated as inferior to the thing itself; instead, it actually takes the place of the thing itself in intelligible experience, where the thing itself never did, and never can, reside.[113]

Matthews regards Augustine's position as a "miscarriage" of an inquiry into our ability to answer questions about the absent past.

110. *Mag*. 12.39.

111. G. Matthews, "Augustine on Speaking from Memory," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 2.2 (1965): 1–4; reprinted in R. A. Markus, *Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1972), 168–75.

112. Matthews, "Augustine on Speaking from Memory," 172.

113. Matthews, "Augustine on Speaking from Memory," 173.

> Augustine is right in thinking that there is no mental mechanism which can give us direct access to absent sensible things. But he is wrong in concluding from this that, when talk turns to such things, we are therefore limited to giving introspective reports on our mental images. In fact the situation is quite otherwise. By making our statements liable to correction from other sources we overcome the imagined limits of mental mechanism and manage to answer questions about the absent things themselves. We need not change the subject unless we want to.[114]

Did Augustine have a motive for wanting to change the subject? By the time he writes *De mendacio* and the *Confessions*, perhaps he did. By that point, he could draw on a valuation of the intelligible over the sensory, and a sceptical epistemology, well-established in his writings. His introspective turn preceded its utilization in autobiography or confession.

Knowing he was, in the present, innocent of the charge of still being a crypto-Manichaean, Augustine refused to concede any point of evidence his accusers were fielding against him. They were in no position to know any truth about the state of his soul, and Megalius was prying into matters that should be left between a soul and God. What good would it serve to rehash the hold Manichaeism had on him at the time and its role in deciding his course of action? He had already openly confessed his Manichaean past. What difference could it make what year, what month, what day had seen his last ritual act as a Manichaean? The truth of his soul had already anticipated the conformity of his body by some time. He was not trying to cover up any sin, but he could construct from the past history of sin a more edifying story, something more useful for others.

He told his own story in a way that did not deny actions that could not be denied, therefore, but that omitted the kind of motivating circumstances his enemies were highlighting, and replaced them with perfectly reasonable alternative motivations that detached his actions from a Manichaean setting. So his movements, his public associations, his speeches and issued writings are freely admitted. But he can say anything he likes about what was going on inside his mind, his doubts, his motivations, his awareness of conditions around him. He can play up his doubts about Manichaeism, and minimize the duration of his strong commitment to it. He can give plausible personal reasons of ambition and schoolroom conditions for leaving Africa. He can confess his own intellectual barriers in taking so long to commit to Catholicism. And he can cap it all with a

114. Matthews, "Augustine on Speaking from Memory," 174.

resort to divine providence: "It was, then, by your guidance that I was persuaded to go to Rome."[115]

Telling for the historian, however, are his omissions in comparison with things we know he knows from other writings: his awareness of the anti-Manichaean laws,[116] his abandonment of his wards,[117] the warrant against him,[118] the exile of Faustus,[119] the execution of Priscillian as a Manichaean,[120] the innuendo of moral offenses associated with Manichaeism.[121] Since we know that Augustine knows these things, and we know that he omits them from the *Confessions*, we must be alert to the distinct possibility that he omits other inconvenient truths along the lines of the allegations made by Megalius and repeated by Petilian.[122]

We come then to the fundamental disconnect between the historian's view of the true past and Augustine's. Does Augustine lie about or conceal the truth about his own past by historical standards? Apparently, he does. Recall that in one minor example that we are able to check—the account of his exchange with Petillian as given in the official acts of the Council of Carthage and as given in his own record of it—Augustine has clearly omitted much, and even lied outright about the immediacy of his answer. The principle of omission he applies to the exchange with the Donatists is the same as that we might suggest was operative for the *Confessions*: nothing ultimately came of these thoughts or words or events, therefore they may be omitted as of no ultimate significance, no teleological meaning. They did not tend toward what would be, and therefore are little more than background noise threatening to obscure the thread of Augustine's story.

115. *Conf.* 5.8.14.
116. *Mor.* 2.19.69.
117. *Acad.* 2.2.3.
118. *C. litt. Petil.* 3.25.30.
119. *Faust.* 5.8.
120. *Nat. bon.* 47. Burrus *The Making of a Heretic*, 97, suggests plausibly that Augustine's information on the Priscillianists was based on discussion in Catholic circles of Maximus's letter and report to bishop Siricius of Rome in 386 C.E., since Augustine's recollection was that he had heard of the affair of these "Manichaeans" when he was in Rome (so presumably during his second sojourn there in 387–388 C.E.). Yet it was certainly also a topic of conversation in Milan when the same embassy from Trier that delivered the report to Siricius in Rome visited the court of Valentinian in the spring of 386 C.E., and Augustine may mean only that it was in Rome that he learned the specific salacious details of the case.
121. *Mor. eccl.* 2.19.67ff.
122. Chadwick also understands Augustine's omissions as dictated by his need to construct a narrative that answered his critics ("On Re-reading the Confessions," 145).

Yet Augustine goes even further than that in challenging the very terms of the historian's question, just as he does those of Megalius's and Petilian's questions. He denies the minimal necessary self of historical discourse, that of an agent responding observably to equally observable external circumstances. He interposes into such simple historical reconstruction an interior self whose intentions may not be reflected fully and transparently in a person's deeds, and whose motivations might derive from a place transcending temporal circumstance. Because of the fracture between the interior self and the lying garment of skin that envelopes it, and because this interior self may be fractured itself, divided in its intentions or partially unknown in its depths, we never know what God knows about us, we are never really sure who we are or what we are about. We must watch ourselves for clues to what God already knows about us. And when we identify a key truth about our character and destiny, all prior conceptions of our self, intentions, motives, and goals must be reconfigured to what has now emerged, because it is that towards which all those prior states were actually tending, despite appearances and misconceptions at the time.

All of this would only become completely clear to Augustine as he was forced to look at his own past and account for himself. One level of self-examination sufficed to answer Megalius, but it opened the door in Augustine's thinking to a more rigorous self-examination that helped to inspire the *Confessions* in the form we now have it. At one and the same time, Augustine identifies the self as the sum total of its experiences, and declares that sum to be incalculable. For that reason, the self remains unknown to all but God. And since it is already known to God, confession is not just superfluous, it is arrogant. By laying claim to know the self well enough to be able to *inform* God about what is hidden within it, one exercises that characteristic pride of human individuality and separateness that dominated Augustine's view of fallen human nature.

So if we have been deceived by Augustine, and taken the *Confessions* as an honest-to-God reportage of events, then we have been inattentive readers. Confession cannot be about revealing and informing what one knows about oneself, but can only be a means of self-discovery, or what in light of modern critical understanding of the self we would call self-construction. It is a rhetorical performance of self, a reconstruction of self according to what faith offers as the raw material of selfhood. The essence of the accusations against Augustine was not about what he had done, but about who he was. He does not need to discover and accurately report his past selves. He only needs to account for how those past selves inform the person he ultimately has become. To answer every idle demand to know

the details of his past life—whom he had slept with, how badly he had treated those around him, his private motivations—would be to yield to mere curiosity, and to tell the story others desire disorderedly, rather than offer a tale conformed to God's intention, which was the providential outcome of his life.

And so Augustine was able to provide Megalius with an account of his conduct that answered the questions about the missing years of his life when he was out of Africa in a way honest to what had ultimately come of it all. The inner truth of his soul offered the only valid story, the only tale worth telling. Did he depart Africa as a Manichaean? Yes, but he already had doubts about the religion. Did he continue to consort with Manichaeans in Italy? Yes, but it was only out of habit and sociability, while his mind was searching for truth. And so on with every move he made: inconvenient factors of the story are eclipsed by a passionate account of his yearning soul. He admits everything that Megalius might have other means of ascertaining. He goes further and admits a number of private faults and weaknesses, disarming the reader with his openness and self-condemnation. Megalius clearly was satisfied, and he approved and ordained Augustine at last in 396 C.E..[123] Would he have agreed with Augustine's standards of truth-telling and ordained him knowing all that Augustine withheld? Possibly not. That Augustine might have thought not has been suggested above as part of the explanatory context of his attempt to suppress the *De mendacio*.

Augustine displays an acute awareness of the power of interiority, and of the concealment of truth enabled by it. Does that mean he takes advantage of it? In the *De mendacio* he provides strong reasons why he should be suspected of doing so. He sees the relative merits of saving an innocent man from an unfair accusation or an unjust law. He recognizes the value of telling an edifying story rather than the rigorous truth for the sake of those who may be shaped by it. He considers such "white lies" tepidly sinful, but nowhere near approaching a violation of the prohibition of giving false witness. All of this brings us to what has been the central question: did he consciously lie in his account of his life? But this is a psychological question, and as such will never be answered historically. It is a question that can only evoke Augustine's own ruminations on the frailty of memory, itself broken and fragmented along with the self, riddled with inaccessible

123. On 396 C.E. as the date of Augustine's episcopal ordination, see the arguments of Dennis Trout, "The Dates of the Ordination of Paulinus of Bordeaux and of his Departure for Nola," *REA* 37 (1991): 237–60.

depths. This was an insight of which Augustine was just becoming aware at the time he began to write the *Confessions*. But already he gave considerable attention to the inability of anyone else to know the inner truth of his soul, and he would repeat this point to his accusers again and again: what he had openly done in the past he had freely confessed and they could make of it what they will; as to accusations about his inner conscience, that they could make no claim to know. Perhaps even Augustine could make no legitimate claim to know. His accusers, just as modern historians, could trace his actions and speculate on the motives behind them; but in focusing their accusations on ultimately unknowable and unprovable motives, they could never hope, as we can never hope, to go beyond plausible reconstructions of the Augustine involved in those actions.

CONCLUSIONS

For most historical figures, we construct a kind of imagined selfhood for them that can account for their particular acts in specific circumstances.[124] Our ideal as historians is to choose the simplest, most plausible connections between external forces acting on the individual and the decisions that emerge in the individual's deeds. We use the individual's own account with caution because speech, too, is performance, and so a datum of our investigation, rather than its culmination. But Augustine has trumped historians in our work by providing, ready-made, such an imagined self meant to account for a piece of his own history. His talent as a rhetorician can be seen in the success of his construct. That Augustine lived with a clear conscience with the story he told of himself tells us only that he held convictions consistent with that story. It tells us nothing about fact or fiction, total disclosure or careful omission, according to the standards of modern history where, contrary to Augustine, we acknowledge the possibility of truth in the material world and what actually happened matters. Can we then claim to know something more true than Augustine knew of himself? This is where one's definition of truth will be decisive. We find ourselves at the very least on an equal footing with Augustine, in no way at a disadvantage in putting up our reconstruction against his; arguing that ours offers the more plausible account of the facts; and claiming the advantage of not being as invested in the conclusions as Augustine quite

124. See J. BeDuhn, "The Historical Assessment of Speech Acts: Clarifications of Austin and Skinner for the Study of Religions," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 12 (2000): 477–505.

obviously was, indeed had to be, when his whole life and future, with all that it would yield as his legacy, was on the line.

In the aftermath of his vindication, Augustine did something remarkable and audacious. He took his defense and turned it into a direct appeal to his former Manichaean associates.[125] The *Confessions* became a narrative not so much of Augustine, as of the ideal conversion from Manichaeism to Catholicism. In it, he offers a sympathetic account of the kinds of life experiences that might lead to adopting the Manichaean world view, and of the honest questions and earnest quest for truth that he and his comrades shared all those years ago. He speaks in glowing terms of their camaraderie and companionship, seeking to identify such noble sentiments as the real force that bound them together, rather than Manichaeism. He reminds them of their true intellectual interests, and then unfolds the story of how he discovered that they were better met in Platonic Catholicism than in a somewhat Stoic Manichaeism, hoping that they will follow. He does all this in language deliberately framed to invoke Manichaean modes of expression, from the gustatory analogy of one's encounter with God, to the emphasis on God's goodness and mercy rather than dread judgment, to the language of the soul's fall and dispersal, to the genre of confession itself which formed such a centerpiece of Manichaean, not Catholic, religious practice at this time. Most tellingly of all, he abandons his demand that faith must precede reason and, as he does in other works directed to a Manichaean readership, condescends to lead them to truth "in the Manichaean manner,"[126] by good reasons without appeal to authority. In books 5–9 of the Confessions, ostensibly an account of the development of his thought preceding and leading to his conversion, Augustine actually summarizes the solutions he worked out in his writings produced after his conversion, right up to the time of the *Confessions* itself.

We may catch of glimpse of Augustine at this moment of deciding how to make his own story more serviceable for the greater good in a sermon he preached in Carthage in the early summer of 397 C.E.. In the immediate aftermath of Megalius's death, Augustine's thoughts appear to have returned to the ethical issues connected with how he had responded to the

125. A strong argument for the work as a protreptic aimed at the Manichaeans has recently been made by Kotzé, *Augustine's Confessions*. Earlier suggestions of a primary concern with Manichaeism driving the work were made by A. Adam, "Das Fortwirken des Manichäismus bei Augustin," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 69 (1958): 1–25; A. Vecchi, "L'antimanichaeismo nelle 'Confessioni' de Sant'Agostino," *Giornale di metafisica* 20 (1965): 91–121.

126. See *Mor. eccl.* 1.2.3.

Primate's accusations. He had preached the day before on the key passage in Galatians where the possibility of false representation or pretense raised by Jerome had so troubled Augustine a few years before.[127] Now that issue intrudes into his *Sermon* 89 on the episode of Jesus cursing the fig tree that had not born fruit (Matt 21.12–19), which Augustine juxtaposes with another fig tree, the one under which Nathanael was sitting when he was seen and summoned by Jesus (John 1.47–51). As demonstrated in several studies, these two biblical fig trees provide the underpinnings for Augustine's account of his own moment of conversion under a fig tree in the garden in Milan; and in *Sermon* 89 they appear in the company of another key antecedent of Augustine's conversion account, the confrontation of Jesus with Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9.4).[128] These highly significant episodes in Augustine's repertoire occur alongside of Augustine's effort to justify how Jesus could be presumed (in Matt 21.12ff.), or even expressly said (in Luke 24.28), to make a false pretense of wanting to do something in order to provide by that deception edifying instruction. About such a tactic, he maintains:

> Because it terminates in a meaning, and the meaning bears the trustworthy stamp of truth, it avoids the charge of falsehood. . . . It is fiction, but not also a lie. Why? Because something pretended or fictitious has a figurative meaning, it doesn't deceive you. It is looking for someone who will understand it, not for someone to mislead. . . . Christ wanted to draw our attention to . . . the possibility of praiseworthy, not sinful pretending; not the sort that will lead you, when you examine it, into falsehood, but the sort that will enable you, when you analyze it, to discover truth.[129]

With this understood, we can appreciate the role of Nathanael—"an Israelite without guile"—under the fig tree. When Jesus tells Nathanael he had already seen him under the fig tree, Augustine takes that to mean, "While you were under the shadow of sin, I predestined you," just as he did Saul, leading them both to the Son of Man as Lord and as Church.[130] To be without guile does not preclude making use of the "praiseworthy pretending" that leads to a greater truth.

127. Augustine alludes to the topic of the sermon given the day before in *Sermon* 89.4, but the sermon itself is lost.

128. On *Serm.* 89, in particular, drawing all of these elements together, see Leo Ferrari, "Saint Augustine on the Road to Damascus," *Augustinian Studies* 13 (1982): 151–70.

129. *Serm.* 89.6; English translation by Edmund Hill, *Sermons, vol. 3, Sermons 51–94*, The Works of Saint Augustine III.3 (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), 439–46.

130. *Serm.* 89.5.

Once we recognize this rewriting of his life for a more edifying purpose, we come closer to the historical Augustine than we ever would by taking the *Confessions* at face value. We find a man who had come to see his life as providential, who had been a Manichaean before finding salvation precisely so that, once saved, he could use what he knew to find a way to win over the Manichaeans. Himself saved by faith, by a sudden recognition of the limitations of human reason and a resort to authority, he could reach those unwilling to abandon reason by showing how reason leads to the same place as faith, even though to do so he needed to fictionalize his own story. This work that had been given to him uniquely to do was far more important to Augustine than any self-indulgent autobiography; and he had been induced to such self-reflection, again, providentially, by the circumstances of the accusations made against him by Megalius. In answering Megalius, and writing the *Confessions*, Augustine vindicated his own variations on the truth by proving that the story well-told is for most people more important, more lasting, more effective than the mere fact of history.

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